**CHILDREN OF GOD DO WHAT IS RIGHT**

October 21, 2012

1 John 2:28-3:24

Key Verse: 3:10 “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.”

In the last passage we learned that knowing God is obeying his commands. His commands are to love God and to love one another. Those who say, “I know God,” but do not obey his commands, are liars and they are walking in the darkness. But in the course of living in this world, we are discouraged by our failures to obey his commands due to our weaknesses, and many practical problems. Many of our students struggled to get through this week due to exams and homework. When we are stressed, everything becomes burdensome. Then we become vulnerable to temptations: temptation to go back to our old lifestyle of sin, temptation to be selfish and take care of myself only; temptation to listen to false teachers who promise magic solutions to all our problems. In today’s passage, St. John teaches us how to overcome the temptations. Instead of struggling with our sins and weaknesses and problems, we should struggle to see the love of God and the glorious hope in him. We should also struggle to do what is right by loving our brothers. Then we can have the assurance of God’s presence within us.

**First**, what we are and what we will be (2:28-3:3). Verses 3:1-2 are full of praise and wonder. John marvels at what we are and at what we will become. Look at verse 1. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him.” The world does not know us. Children of God do not get the “star treatment.” We are not escorted to the front of the line.

Last week Sheila’s friend got a job at a city hall as an assistant planner. Sheila got really frustrated and angry because she seemed better qualified. Her friend got a job due to her better connection. We want God to be our fairy god-mother who gives us anything we want and enjoy some privileges in this world. But we do not get any special treatment, and have to struggle very hard. Yet we have a far greater privilege--not recognition by the world, but recognition by God. John puts this proclamation, “and that is what we are!” as a counterpoint to the world’s disdain. It does not matter what the world says. “How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! That is what we are.”

God’s love is described here as “lavish” – it is almost excessive. It is too much, more than we could expect. Like the prodigal son, we should take a servant’s place, but instead the father puts the signet ring on our finger. He welcomes us as his children, and we can cry out to him, “Abba, Father.” Some children were playing out on the play ground at school, and began to pick on a child who was adopted. “You don’t have real parents,” they taunted. “You don’t even know who your real parents are! You’re just adopted.” To that, the adopted child responded. “Oh yeah?” When you were born, your parents didn’t have a choice. They had to keep you. My parents didn’t just have me. They wanted me!” You are a child of God because God wanted you. From eternity, he chose you to be his own. Before you were ever born, before you ever had a chance to prove yourself to be a sinner, God chose you to be a member of his family. He made your place in his family possible by carrying out a plan of salvation through his Son, Jesus Christ. We can say with confidence, “I am a child of God!”

When we think about the word, “lavished,” it is a very difficult word to practice to fallen mankind. It means that God did not spare his Son, but freely gave him to us as an atoning sacrifice on the cross to make us children of God. One can give a junky car to his friend. We can give some of our used furniture to our friends. But it is not easy for anyone to give one’s son as the atoning sacrifice. There is a story about an Indian giver. A certain American Indian had nine sons and three daughters. But they were very poor and the parents could not take care of them properly. So the Indian father went to a well-known American missionary who had no children and asked for some money on the condition that he would give him one of his nine sons. But the next day, early in the morning around 5:00 a.m., the Indian father brought back the money bag and sat down on the ground and cried and cried, and said, “Here is your money bag.” It meant, “Give my son back to me.” The Indian father thought that since he had nine sons, giving one son to a childless American missionary was a good thing. The Indian father thought he could use the large amount of money for his family and let the American missionary adopt his son and care for him and give his son a higher education. But overnight his assumption vanished. Instead, his son given to the American missionary seemed to have been calling him, crying and waving his two little hands, calling, “Daddy! Daddy!” The Indian father felt like dying, not to mention getting some sleep. So he went and brought his son back. Since that time, a saying spread, “You are an Indian giver.”

It is easy for anyone to think that he could give one of his sons for the sake of blessing others. However, practically, to give one’s son to others is impossible. One day, a UBF senior shepherd asked a junior shepherd, “Since you have three sons, can you give one of them to Dr. Noah Rhee?” The junior shepherd was very obedient. So he went home and talked about the story to his wife. His wife was furiously mad and yelled at him, “Are you really crazy? What are you talking about? You don’t know what you are talking about! You may have to go to a mental hospital!”

But God gave his one and only Son Jesus Christ as the atoning sacrifice to save men from their sins. This is the love of God and this is the reason that God is love. In order to send his one and only Son, God had to let his one and only Son sacrifice in many ways. First, God made his Son renounce all his heavenly glory and power and made him humble until he was born in a stable of an animal and laid in a manger. Why was he born in the stable of animals and laid in a manger? It was to become a friend with the most fatalistic people of the world. Why was he laid in the manger? It was because he wanted to become friends with the most sorrowful people. Jesus did so, finally, to make friends with all kinds of wretched sinners. Next, God made his Son the Lamb of God. Isaiah 53:7 says, “He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.” When Isaiah thought about Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross, he cried out, “Who can believe this? Why should this happen to Jesus?” God’s lavishing his love on us through his one and only Son is beyond description.

Verse 1 tells us what we are – children of God. But verse 2 tells us what we will become – and it turns out to be even greater. Look at verse 2. “Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” Right now, we are children of God, but we shall become something greater – we will become like him. 1 Corinthians 15:49 says, “And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven.” Our bodies are now perishable, dishonorable, and weak. Many of you are struggling with studies and sick bodies. You wish that you are smart to understand everything. But we will have glorious resurrection bodies which are imperishable, strong, and glorious. Look at verse 3. “Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure.” When we struggle to have this glorious hope in our hearts, God will gradually change our value system and purify us and make us holy.

**Second**, children of God do what is right (4-15). There have been those who abuse God’s love and grace. They say, “Once saved, always saved! I confessed Jesus when I was 11. So now I can be as bad as I want to be!” Or they can sound more theological. They say, “We are under grace, not under law. So I am free to do whatever I want.” Look at verse 6. “No one who lives in him keeps on sinning. No one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” Sin is lawlessness. It is refusing to acknowledge God’s will in our lives. We want to be our own man. But once we become children of God, we have to obey our Father and follow his rules such as loving one another. Look at verse 9. “No one who is born of God will continue to sin, because God’s seed remains in him; he cannot go on sinning, because he has been born of God.” Is John saying that true Christians never sin? If so, then am I a Christian? In 1 John 1:8, John wrote, “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.” So then what is he saying? We should note the verbs; “continue to sin” “keep on sinning” “go on sinning.” These verbs suggest that Christians are not perfect, but they have a righteous lifestyle. They might sin, but they cannot go on sinning. Someone put it this way, “When we were unbelievers, we felt bad when we sinned. But the more we sinned, the more comfortable we became, until it seemed OK. But when we became Christian, the more we sinned, the more uncomfortable we become.” Luke said, “Once we become children of God, we cannot be successful sinners anymore.”

Look at verse 10. “This is how we know who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: Anyone who does not do what is right is not a child of God; nor is anyone who does not love his brother.” This verse provides a test of being children of God. Children of God are characterized not by sin, but by doing what is right. So instead of struggling with sin, we should struggle to do what is right, namely, loving our brother. In verses 12-15 John shows us what children of God are not like by using Cain as an example.

According to Genesis 4, Cain offered God some of the fruits of the soil as an offering but God was not pleased with his offering. However, his brother Abel offered fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock and the Bible tells us that God looked with favor on him and his offering. After hearing about this, Cain became very angry and his face was downcast. Cain’s anger toward God and lack of repentance showed he didn’t have the desire to do what was right. Instead he invited sin in and eventually murdered his own brother. He was a child of the devil.

If we are children of God, we should have a desire to please him by striving to do what is right. We can tell whose children we are based on what we do, because children copy their parents. Children of God must learn from our Father God, obeying and imitating him.

**Third,** the way to know the love of God (16-24). How do we know the love of God? Look at verse 16. “This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers.” Those who love God and practice God’s love to their brothers are those who know the love of God. There are many people who say, “I love God. I love my brothers.” But if they have to spend even a little money for their brothers, they become very unhappy. Look at verse 17. “If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” We Christians should not love our brothers with words or tongue, but with actions and in truth (18). If we see our brothers falling away by sinning against God and have no sympathy for them in our hearts, that means that the love of God is not in our hearts and we are not the children of God. This is the test of being the children of God. This is the test of being true Christians.

When we want to help others, sometimes we have no money. What’s more, we have many excuses not to love our brothers. Then we have a sense of condemnation and may wonder if we are really true Christians. Sh. John assures us that if we feel love for our brothers welling up within our hearts, then the heart of Christ is in us. Look at verses 19-20. “This then is how we know that we belong to the truth, and how we set our hearts at rest in his presence whenever our hearts condemn us. For God is greater than our hearts, and he knows everything.” When we have the love of God in our hearts toward our brothers, we come to know that we are in the truth. When we are in the truth, we have the peace of God. It is a remarkable fact that when a person is saved, he has an entirely different attitude toward our brothers. In this way, we have the assurance of salvation.

As we struggle in this world with many problems, let us remember who we are. We are children of God, loved by God and we will become like him. Instead of struggling with sin and our problems, we should struggle to see the glorious hope of what we will be, and do what is right, namely to love God and to love our brothers.